

Tennessee Succeeds

Building on what is working through the Every Student Succeeds Act

In fall 2015, the department released our strategic plan, *Tennessee Succeeds*, which outlined the five-year vision and work of the state. Through this plan, the department, in partnership with our education community, set big goals that will move us forward in our work to prepare all students to be successful after high school:

1. Tennessee will rank in the top half of all states on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) by 2019.
 - *As of fall 2015, we ranked in the top 25 on one NAEP assessment: fourth grade math.*
2. Seventy-five percent of Tennessee third graders will be proficient in reading by 2025.
 - *As of fall 2015, only 43 percent of third graders were reading on grade level or above.*
3. The average ACT composite score in Tennessee will be a 21 by 2020.
 - *As of fall 2015, our average public school composite was a 19.4.*
4. The majority of high school graduates from the class of 2020 will earn a postsecondary certificate, diploma, or degree.
 - *As of fall 2015, less than a quarter of high school graduates from the class of 2008 earned a postsecondary credential within six years.*

While there are a number of opportunities for continued improvement, our schools, educators, and students have achieved a number of remarkable successes in the past year. Here are a few bright spots:

- Our students again made Tennessee the **fastest improving state in the country**—this time in science. Tennessee moved into the top half of states in both fourth and eighth grade science, **moving us closer toward our first goal.**
- Our **graduation rate rose** to the highest on record: 88.5 percent.
- Our **college-going rate improved** by 5 percent—which is more than the increase from the past six years combined.
- State leaders made a **historic investment** in Tennessee's education funding—the biggest increase in the history of the Basic Education Plan fund without a tax increase.
- Our high school students earned **more college credits**—7,500 more in 2016 compared to 2014.

- Public school students maintained our average ACT score, and **1,300 more students have become eligible for the HOPE scholarship.**
- High school seniors had a **new option to retake the ACT**, which nearly 24,000 signed up to take.
- We launched the **Read to be Ready** campaign, and alongside over 90 districts, we are building a network of **200 reading coaches** and executing on a new framework and vision for early literacy.
- Twenty **Read to be Ready summer programs** served almost 600 students and provided families with close to 12,000 books to take home.
- **Commissioner McQueen has visited more than 12,000 teachers, 148 schools, and 99 districts** so far on the Classroom Chronicles tour, and she launched the second leg to visit with high school students and hear about their dreams, opportunities, challenges, and how their schools are preparing them for life after graduation. In addition, the department led 26 student focus groups.
- The State Board of Education approved **new math and English language arts standards**, which will be used next year, and has been gathering feedback on social studies and science standards.
- We learned from our experience on the **new TNReady assessment**, and we have taken steps forward to improve the testing experience: establishing a new contract with a proven vendor to deliver TNReady, **reducing testing time this year by 30 percent**, and phasing into online testing.

Tennessee continues to experience challenges on the pathway to moving more students to success beyond high school. Here are a few that highlight the continuing urgency to improve:

- **Nearly 35 percent** of high school graduates do not enroll in postsecondary within two years of graduation.
- **Only 17 percent** of high school graduates in Tennessee are considered college and career ready on all four readiness benchmarks of the ACT.
- Although early postsecondary opportunities are widely available, just **40 percent of the 2015 graduating class attempted one. Less than 25 percent** of high school graduates earn early postsecondary credit.
- Students in **historically underserved student groups** continue to struggle. For example, while overall 43 percent of third graders were reading on grade level in 2015, only 32 percent of those identified as economically disadvantaged were reading proficiently, and that dropped to just 22 percent of English learners and 20 percent for students with disabilities.
- About 14 percent of kindergartners and 16 percent of ninth graders were **chronically absent** in 2015-16.

Opportunities for the work ahead

Through *Tennessee Succeeds*, we set priority areas: **early foundations and literacy, high school and the bridge to postsecondary, all means all, educator support, and district empowerment.** These build on our educational foundation: **high standards, aligned assessments, and strong accountability.** Since the launch of the strategic plan, we have taken key steps in each of these areas, and we believe we are on the right path—and now we are building on this work through our ESSA state plan.

In May, we launched a statewide feedback tour, and so far, we have heard from more than 2,500 individuals and organizations. As we prepare to submit the final ESSA plan to the U.S. Department of Education in the spring, we want to hear from more stakeholders to ensure we have a plan that builds on our successes, meets the needs of Tennessee's students, and helps us capitalize on our opportunities.

Opportunity One: Set high expectations that align to postsecondary and workforce readiness so all of Tennessee's students are able to pursue their chosen path in life.

The majority of Tennessee's college faculty and employers tell us that high school graduates are not ready for the expectations they have in their classrooms and the work place. By setting high standards for all students, and by aligning those to instructional practices and state assessments that ensure students stay on track each year, every Tennessee child will have the opportunity to pursue their dreams after high school.

Opportunity Two: Attend to the needs of all students in pre-K-12—especially historically disadvantaged students—so they can experience success after high school.

It is our responsibility to close our achievement gaps so each child—regardless of their race, gender, socioeconomic status, or zip code—receives a world-class education. Through supporting the whole child and the environment in which he or she learns, we will promote equity and excellence for all our students.

Opportunity Three: Provide support, funding, intervention, and innovation for persistently low-performing schools.

While many of our schools are continually improving, students in some of our schools have dramatically lower outcomes. We want to take a coordinated approach to turning around these schools by focusing on and investing in the people who are doing this hard work and the support networks around those educators.

Opportunity Four: Focus on strengthening and supporting educators.

Having a high-quality teacher is the biggest in-school factor on a student's success, but often our students who are most behind do not have access to our most effective teachers. We want to comprehensively strengthen the profession by recruiting, retaining, and rewarding educators and by providing more—and better—opportunities for them to develop their craft.

Opportunity Five: Empower districts to drive toward student goals.

We believe the state's primary role is to support districts and incentivize the right outcomes, rather than directly manage classrooms. Under this theory of action, we are increasing the tools, data, and support available for districts. Through the district accountability framework, we are encouraging districts to ensure that all their students are learning and that their classrooms meet the school-level accountability that ESSA and Tennessee state law requires. We are also providing opportunities for districts to take their strengths further.